

Abstract 590

TITLE: Effective HIV and Health Intervention for “Cantineras” (Barmaids)

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ISSUE: Design and implementation of effective HIV/STD Outreach and Intervention to at-risk Hispanic women who work as “Cantineras” (barmaids) in Houston, Texas. Large numbers of Hispanic women, primarily immigrants, work in an environment putting themselves at risk for HIV and STD. These women do not access public health care for fear of deportation or other reasons. To be effective, HIV/STD education must be delivered in their own language and environment.

SETTING: Neighborhood “cantinas” or beer joints across the greater Houston area which employ “cantineras.” Owners of cantinas make available on the premises a private area for one-on-one education, followed by HIV testing and gynecological exams. Services provided free of charge to women over the age of eighteen.

PROJECT: Outreach Workers “scout” for cantinas in selected areas. Once cantinas are identified, a visit is made to the bartender who in most cases is the cantina owner. AVES requests permission from the owner to offer HIV education and gynecological care to the cantineras. Once trust is established, the service is explained to the women who either accept or decline. A 2-hour education session is scheduled to take place before the cantineras’ shift starts. This ensures the women’s privacy during the intervention, captures their entire attention and prevents interference with their job duties. Four educational modules, 15 minutes each, are presented: (1) basic human anatomy and the reproductive system; (2) prevention and detection of HIV/STD; (3) gynecological examination, its process and importance; and (4) birth control methods. Full gynecological examinations are provided after the education session. The examinations provided on-site eliminate barriers posed by lack of transportation or unfamiliarity with public health clinics. Follow-up meetings are scheduled within 2 weeks for delivery of test results and for any treatment of STDs.

RESULTS: For calendar year 1998, 269 women received one-on-one HIV/STD education and a private medical exam. Average age is 31 years. Follow up provided to approximately 80% of women. Seven percent required treatment for STDs (syphilis and chlamydia). A high percentage (42%) of women reported no use of any birth control method. Less than 1% of all women tested resulted in a positive diagnosis of HIV. The prevalence of other STDs indicates an increased risk for HIV infection. Twenty-seven percent of women tested resulted in abnormal Pap smear. Collaborative efforts allow for successful follow up and treatment for these women.

LESSONS LEARNED: A successful outreach intervention can be conducted safely, directly in the community, as long as it is built on trust. Contact with these women shows they are receptive to education and desire access to basic health care. A successful outreach team consists of culturally competent workers, cross-trained to provide education and testing, who can interact with the target population in their native language. For the most part, HIV education and outreach has been minimal in these overlooked areas of Houston. The need exists for more intense outreach and complementary services reach for hard to populations.

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